[Mex]ICO'S STRUGGLE

FOR

LIBERTY

BY

HENRY L. MOREHOUSE, LL.D.

Corresponding Secretary.



Statue of Hidalgo
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Mexico's Long Struggle for Liberty

By Henry L. Morehouse, LL.D.

The centennial celebration on September 16, 1910, by the Republic of Mexico, of the first declaration of independence and revolt against Spanish misrule, was an event of much significance and interest to lovers of civil and religious liberty. It emphasizes the fact of Mexico's alignment with the progressive nations of the world. It may have far-reaching influence for good in the present struggle in Spain and in Portugal for separation of Church and State.

In connection with the impressive civic ceremonies of the occasion, two great religious convocations illustrate conspicuously the degree of religious liberty that exists and the strength of evangelical forces in the Republic. These are the National Baptist Convention, followed by the Interdenominational Sunday School Convention. Doubtless these constitute the largest Protestant assemblage ever seen in Mexico.



PORFIRIO DIAZ, PRESIDENT OF MEXICO.

The story of the long struggle of the forces of freedom against the powerful forces in Church and State is of intense interest. Knowledge of the course of events must heighten our respect and admiration for those qualities of Mexican character which won signal victories over these long entrenched antagonists.

Union of Church and State

For nearly 300 years the monarchical spirit in Church and State had dominated Mexico. Papal claim to absolute supremacy both in civil and religious affairs had been fully recognized by the sixty-one viceroys of Spain in the 286 years from 1535 to 1821. Only one of that number was born in America, and he in Peru. It was rule of the Spaniard, by the Spaniard, for the Spaniard. Spaniards filled all offices, which were regularly sold in Madrid to the highest bidder. Priest and soldier, bishop and viceroy locked arms and kept step with each other in the interests of the Church, which overshadowed the State, exercised many of its appropriate functions, dictated its legislation, and leech-like grew rich at its expense. The people were prohibited from producing anything that would compete with the industries of Spain, and were made as dependent as possible upon the mother country.

Thoroughly monarchical in her spirit, theory and practice, the Church of Rome had no sympathy whatever with the effort to establish a Mexican Republic. It was done in spite of her utmost opposition. The definite, clear-cut purpose to form a Republic was not apparently in the minds of those who first rose in rebellion against Spanish misrule. They wanted freedom from the galling yoke; they aimed simply at Mexican independence. These, even, were smitten by the Church.

Patriotic Martyrs

When Miguel Hidalgo, of Dolores, State of Guanajuato (a native of South America), sounded forth his "Grito," or revolutionary cry, that quickly summoned 100,000 men to his standard in 1810, the Church made common cause with the State in his overthrow by deposing him from his priesthood and approving his execution in 1811. By that act the Church lost more than she gained, for with many of the sorely oppressed people patriotism was paramount. They hated the churchly hand that smote their loved leader. When Iturbide on that high church day, Good Friday, in 1814, shot 300 independents who had been taken prisoners, the hierarchy was sponsor for the statement that "they were excommunicated persons, and that the Spanish authorities employed spiritual weapons as well as swords, muskets and cannon in subjugating the independents." Rome had no use for "Independents." The breach was widened by this atrocity.

When Hidalgo's lieutenant, Morelos, raised anew the standard of his fallen leader and convened the first Mexican Congress (1814), the Inquisition itself condemned him to death as "a disturber of the religious hierarchy," etc., and so at the hand of Rome he met a martyr's fate (1815).

A military order directed that "the insurgents should be pursued, incarcerated and killed like wild beasts." Wider still grew the breach between the Church and Mexican patriots.

When Iturbide, under pressure of Liberal sentiment, pro-

mulgated the "Iguala Plan" for a constitutional monarchy and proclaimed the absolute independence of Mexico (1821), the hierarchy regarded it with disfavor, even though the constitution declared that "the religion of the Mexican nation is and shall be perpetually the Roman Catholic Apostolic. The nation protects it by wise and just laws, and prohibits the exercise of any other whatsoever." They managed to be well represented in the new Congress (1822) and then, having obtained promises of favors for the Church, threw their influence against the constitutional monarchy and in support of Iturbide as Emperor of Mexico (1822). Bishops and an archbishop exultantly participated in his gorgeous coronation. Short-lived were their rejoicings, and the empire itself expired with Iturbide's abdication the next year (1823).

The First Grapple

Again the supporters of a new civil order rallied in stronger force and with clearer convictions than ever before. A new Congress was convened on October 4, 1824; gave to Mexico a Liberal constitution resembling that of the United States; divided the country into nineteen States and four Territories, and provided for the election of a president. This was really the birth of the Republic. The swelling tide of patriotism went so far as to decree (1829) the expulsion of all Spaniards from Mexico—a decree, however, that was only partially enforced. It was a mournful day for the Church when the last Spanish army sent against Mexico was routed, and Spain was forced to abandon her foothold in Mexico (1829), where she had been mistress for full 300 years.

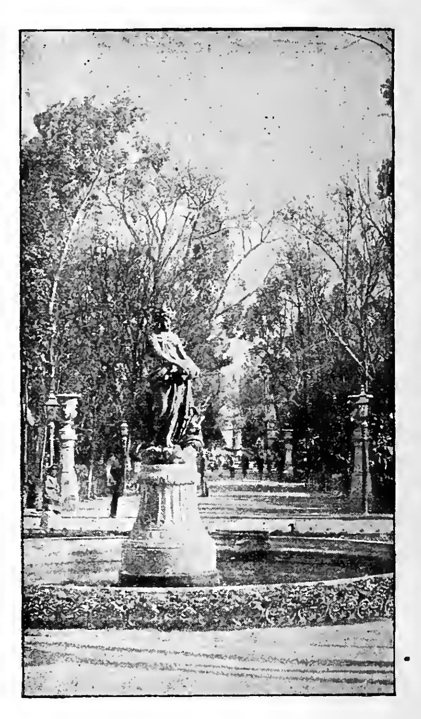
The pernicious activity of the Romish Church against the new Republic exasperated its friends to the highest degree. As an act of self-preservation for the Republic, Congress struck a terrific blow at the implacable enemy by enacting laws for the abrogation of the authority of the Pope over the Church in Mexico, for the suppression of convents and for the abolition of the compulsory payment of tithes to the Church (1833). It even proposed to appropriate the property of the Church for the payment of the national debt. This, the first overt act of the Government against the Church, created a tremendous sensation. The Clericals combined all possible opposing elements to nullify this action and to overthrow the Republic. Conspiring with the Centralists, they succeeded in making Santa Ana dictator (1835). For the next eleven years revolution followed revolution, the policy of the Church being: Anything to beat the Republic.

In 1846 the Federal forces were in the ascendant and reestablished the government on the basis of the constitution of 1824. Opposition from the old foes broke out afresh, and for about ten years the country was in constant turmoil.

A Bold Stroke

In 1855 there came to the front the master-mind of the Republic—"the Washington of Mexico"—Benito Juarez, of pure aboriginal stock. With clear vision and iron nerve he

adopted heroic treatment for afflicted Mexico; first, in 1856 as Minister of Justice under President Alvarez, in the promulgation of laws abolishing the privileges of the clergy and the army and prohibiting the clergy from holding real estate, and by a decree confiscating the property of the Church; and in 1857, as Secretary of State under President Comonfort, in the radical measures adopted to crush the Clerical conspirators against the Republic. Foremost among these was the opulent order of the Franciscan monks. Having positive proof that they had organized a powerful conspiracy to overthrow the Government and establish a monarchy, Comonfort



THE ALAMEDA, MEXICO CITY.

by a lightning stroke commanded the Federal troops at once to seize and hold the great Franciscan monastery, covering four blocks in the City of Mexico; ordered that a new street called "Independencia" be cut clean through the middie of it; declared the property forfeited to the State, and suppressed the monastery itself for treasonable acts.

The new constitution of 1857 contained a provision for full religious liberty. Rome was furious. The archbishop remonstrated, insisting that the State should recognize only Roman Catholicism. So formidable became the opposition that a compromise was effected by the omission of that article, and the silence of the constitution on the subject was considered as equivalent to the continuance of Rome's exclusive religious rights.

Rome in the Saddle

Because the constitution did not recognize the extreme demands of prelates, and because of other obnoxious provisions, the batteries of the Church opened a terrific bombardment against it; priests denounced it; the archbishop pronounced the oath to support it null and void; retraction was demanded of those who had taken the oath of allegiance, and the loyal governor was prohibited from entering the cathedral on the ground that he had sworn to support the constitution. Under this opposition many Liberals who regarded the new measures as too extreme wavered and gave the government but feeble support.

Forming alliances with every disaffected element, with men of selfish ambitions, the Church party organized a counter government that recognized Roman Catholicism as the exclusive religion, the chief executive to be subject only to the Church; compelled President Comonfort to flee the country (1858); held control of the whole interior; indeed, drove the Republic almost into the Gulf of Mexico. On its shore, at Vera Cruz, the Republican remnant re-erected the standard of the government with Juarez as President (1858). Rome was in the saddle in the historic city, with the wealth of the Church at her command; the Republic was on foot and almost beggared, except in the imperial endowment of right, of brains, a lofty purpose and indomitable will.

Rome had resolved to make herself secure by European reinforcements for a Mexican monarchy. The Clericals sent Almonte to Paris, where he plotted with Napoleon and others to this end (1857).

Rome Routed

To their dismay, like an apparition, the Republic with fresh vigor arose; from its seat of government at Vera Cruz emitted a decree (July 12, 1859), confiscating and nationalizing all the property of the clergy; enacted laws granting religious freedom (December 4, 1860); victorious in battle, reinstated itself in the City of Mexico (January, 1861); when Juarez summarily banished the Papal delegate, the archbishop and several bishops, who hastily embarked for Europe, whither the fugitive monarchist Miramon also went, reinforcing Almonte at Paris, visiting also Spain and Italy on his mission for European intervention in Mexico. Most vigorously did Juarez apply the axe to the roots of the Papal upas tree. At midnight on February 13, 1861, at the signal tolling of a bell, the nuns from twelve convents were removed to the other ten, where they temporarily remained. In 1863 orders were issued to vacate every convent within eight days. The sequestration of church property went on apace. Ecclesiastics and religious orders stood aghast at the havoc, at the loss of accumulated wealth of three centuries.

Confiscated Possessions

"I am rich and have need of nothing," the Mexican Church could complacently say of herself. In 1750 it held in deeds

and mortgages about one-third of the real estate of Mexico, and its yearly income was equal to the interest on $115,-000,000. A century later (1850) its holdings embraced 861 large estates and 22,000 city lots, valued at $184,000,000; its yearly income was reckoned at $25,000,000; the Bishop of Puebla kept the wolf from his door on a yearly revenue of $110,000, and the Archbishop of Mexico eked out his existence on $130,000. The clergy of the City of Mexico owned at least half of its 5,000 houses, valued at $80,000,000. This enormous wealth enabled the Church and the religious orders to build magnificent churches, spacious monasteries and convents, and, as emergency demanded, to provide the monarchists with funds to fight the Republic. In 1858 there were fifty-nine nunneries, 146 monasteries, 3,000 nuns, 1,500 monks and 4,000 priests and clergy in Mexico. Ecclesiastics of all kinds were a solid phalanx against the Republic. The members of these and the wealth of the Church were a standing menace to the government. The Church showed no mercy to the Republic, and received no mercy in return.

The Pope to the Rescue

At this crisis of the Church, was it not a striking coincidence that the Pope (1861) promulgated his *Syllabus of Errors,* followed by his famous *Encyclical* (1864)? Were not these designed to whip into line the Church forces against the Republic? Therein he anathematized all who held these heretical doctrines: "The Church ought to be separated from the State and the State from the Church." "The Church has not the power of availing herself of force, or any direct or indirect temporal power." "Every man is free to embrace and profess the religion he shall believe true, guided by the light of reason." "It appertains to the civil power to define what are the rights and limits with which the Church may exercise authority." "It is no longer expedient that the Catholic religion shall be held as the only religion of the State to the exclusion of all other modes of worship." "The Roman Pontiff can and ought to reconcile himself to, and agree with, progress, liberalism and civilization as lately introduced." Time was when anathemas from the infallible Pontiff would have hurried the return of frightened heretics back to the fold. That time had passed for multitudes in Mexico; yet it was not without its effect in behalf of the Church.

Progress of the Papal Conspiration

The Clerical conspirators in Europe found in the Empress Eugénie an earnest ally. Papal messages incited her zeal as she urged upon Napoleon III "the duty and the glory of the new crusade to restore to the Latin race its supremacy in the new world; to recover for the Church its royal estates and resources, and to stop the onward march of the Saxon, as Charles Martel stayed that of the Saracen." Usurper that he was, assassin of one Republic, ambitious as Lucifer, Napoleon III determined "to make this the most brilliant page in the history of his reign." He entrapped England

into the short-lived triple alliance with France and Spain. The first invading fleet of Spain took Vera Cruz (December, 1861); the French expeditionary force, with the conspirator Almonte, landed in 1862; was increased to 40,000 in 1863; captured the City of Mexico, and established the Franco-Mexican regency, which issued a pronunciamento that was sweet music to Clerical ears: "The Catholic religion is re-established and free. The Church will exercise its authority without having an enemy in the government."

Over in Europe the plotters decided upon a limited hereditary monarchy, "with a Catholic Prince," for Mexico. Maximilian, a zealous churchman, was selected, accepted, went to Rome for Papal advice and blessing, and arrived in Mexico in 1864 (May 28), where the Church party welcomed him with a grand ovation.

Dark days were these for the Republic. The rich, the clergy, the remains of the old army in sympathy with intervention and 40,000 disciplined French troops constituted a force compared with which the scattered, undisciplined, poorly equipped troops of the Republic seemed insignificant. Several European governments recognized the Empire. Maximilian, in his gorgeous carriage glittering with gold (now in the museum in Mexico), was drawn by caparisoned horses through obsequious throngs; while President Juarez, a fugitive, hunted by the French, deserted by former supporters, went northward even to El Paso—now called "the City of Juarez" in his honor—maintaining the semblance of a government, while military chieftains of the Republic in Central Mexico kept up the fight against the French.

The Church now thought the favored time had come to recover its sequestered estates and to get other favors from the Empire. To the amazement of the Papal nuncio and the prelates, Maximilian answered that while he recognized the spiritual authority of the Pope, yet in civil matters he recognized no superior, and, not only denying their request, issued a decree of limited religious toleration, though maintaining Roman Catholicism as the State religion. Anticipating the Papal *Encyclical* of 1864, he forbade bishops to read it to their flocks without his consent. He had learned the strength and character of the Liberal element. He had also learned something of the rottenness of Mexican Romanism, so graphically described by Chaplain Abbé Domenech, of the French Expedition. Most vehement were the protests of the Church party who put him in power, that all this was contrary to the bases on which the Empire was established, the maintenance of the Church being the chief cornerstone and the special reason for war on the Juarists. It seems like a grave political blunder of the over-confident Emperor.

The Turn in the Tide

Now for the Republic came the turn in the tide. During its terrible struggle for self-preservation the United States took no active part in Mexican affairs beyond refusal to recognize the Empire, and mildly object to European intervention.

When the Civil War ended Seward spoke out plainly to Napoleon; Grant sent Sherman with 50,000 veterans into the Southwest along the Rio Grande; the Juarez Government found financial friends in New York who loaned it $30,000,000 (1865), and was quietly supplied with 30,000 Springfield rifles by United States authorities, who also the next year (November, 1866,) recognized Juarez as President of the Mexican Republic. These telling hints to Napoleon III resulted in the recall of his troops. Alarmed for Maximilian and the Empire, Carlotta hastened to Europe, tearfully interceding with Napoleon and the Pope for their continued support. Crushed by their refusal, her brilliant intellect gave way to disordered phantoms. The French evacuated Mexico in January, 1867. Within five months Maximilian, as prisoner of war with his generals, Miramon and Mejia, was courtmartialed and shot at Queretaro on June 19, 1867. And at his fall fell all hope of a Catholic monarchy for Mexico.

Retribution for Rome

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." Miramon, formidable enemy of the Republic and schemer for a Church monarchy, and Mejia, "king of the mountains," renowned for his prowess in behalf of the Church, perished in the war they had provoked; Maximilian, who branded as bandits and approved the execution of scores of Federal prisoners, was in turn similarly branded and shot; and within three years more (1870) Napoleon III and Pope Pius IX were forced to drink to the dregs the bitter cup of degradation which they had pressed to Mexico's lips, as the one sat at Sedan, the humiliated captive of Protestant Germany; the other, in Rome, subject and self-confessed "prisoner" of triumphant Victor Emanuel and emancipated Italy. The curtain fell on the great tragedy with cultured Carlotta a demented widow at Miramar, and Eugénie a fugitive from the French Republic to abhorred Protestant England, in her widowhood at Chiselhurst mourning over the extinction of Napoleonic hopes in her son's tragic death at the hands of African Zulus. Thus vanished the dazzling vision of Latin-papal supremacy and the temporal power of the papacy on this continent.

"Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small;
Though in patience stands he waiting,
With exactness grinds he all."

The Republic Established

Fifty-seven years from the time of Hidalgo's "Grito," forty-three years from the adoption of the first constitution and after four years of the War of Intervention (April, 1863-June, 1867) Juarez re-entered the capital in July, 1867, was chosen President and repeatedly re-elected until 1871, dying in 1872. The two Republics embraced each other when Secretary Seward visited Mexico in 1869, and was justly given a magnificent reception. Difficult was the task of evolving order out of chaotic and discordant elements; slow the

process of national unification. Sour and sullen were the Clericals, who in the most undisguised and galling manner socially ostracized the President and his ministers, and spared no occasion to deride and disparage the government. Continuing their hostility, the clergy were deprived of the right of suffrage in 1871, and in 1873 the Mexican Republic aligned itself with her older sister north of the Rio Grande by adopting this amendment to the constitution: "The State and the Church are independent of each other. The Congress may not pass laws establishing or prohibiting any religion."

At this the rage of Rome broke out afresh. The Vatican thundered against public functionaries who took oath to support the amended constitution and the new laws. The clergy, who exercised almost unlimited influence over ignorant Indians, aroused their passions to the pitch of rioting. Equally obnoxious to them was the amendment making marriage a civil contract. Maddened at the loss of exorbitant marriage fees, they denounced the government as atheistic, declared civil marriage adulterous, and advising the people to disregard it led multitudes to unlawful cohabitation; and themselves disfranchised, used their power to prevent the people from exercising the right of suffrage, which really was advantageous to the Republic, inasmuch as it gave greater relative political influence to the Liberal party.

Things Upside Down

The Romish Church in Mexico may profitably meditate upon the Saviour's words: "He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword." The suppression of religious orders was complete, the Sisters of Charity being the last to go, in 1874. In the cities we see no hooded nun, no gowned priest, no religious processions. All these are prohibited. Along some streets cut through monasteries, in the City of Mexico, are massive ragged walls, arches and exposed interiors, reminding one, on a small scale, of the ruins of Rome.

Properties of convents, monasteries and churches passing into government ownership were sold, or converted to other uses—for schools, hotels, public buildings, military barracks, tenement houses, some churches for Protestant houses of worship. The government, however, allowed the Romish Church the use of most of the cathedrals and many of the church buildings for religious services. Where doctors of the Inquisition diagnosed the cases of suspected heretics, doctors of the Medical College teach their classes; where nuns of "Our Lady of Mercy" counted their beads, hucksters of the Merced Market count their centavos; where nuns of "Nuestra Senora de la Encarnacion," in their extensive premises valued at more than a million dollars, were a law unto themselves, professors of the School of Jurisprudence expound the supreme civil law and a girls' school is maintained; at Toluca a superb convent building, with spacious patio, contains the State Normal School for Girls, as at Saltillo Baptists have similar premises for a girls' school, and at Puebla the Methodists have schools for both sexes. Where the martyr Morelos fell a victim of the Inquisition stands



his bronze statue, erected by th
turned upside down, deservedly
been wrong side up.

The revolution was remarkal
is the tethered tiger awaiting an
the throat of the Republic. Will that hour
assured that on this American continent, in this age of the world, revolutions do not go backward, either north or south of the Rio Grande.

Present Relations of Church and State

The Roman Catholic hierarchy is utterly unreconciled to the existing order. The rank and file of the Church would speedily give the government their loyal support were it not for the meddlesome priesthood. The people at large are not to be included in the condemnation of their leaders. Church officials do not recognize the validity of the reform constitution of 1857 and its amendments of 1873.

The Federal government and the State governments generally are in the hands of Liberals, whose numbers and influence increase yearly; who are well entrenched, have the army at their command, and more than all, have one of their own number, a vigilant, well-balanced, cultivated, broad-minded and thoroughly progressive man, Porfirio Diaz, as President of the Republic. There is a growing feeling of contentment, satisfaction and pride over the strength, stability and brighter prospects of the Republic. Toward the Church of Rome, as toward all other religious bodies, it maintains an attitude of dignified neutrality. All alike enjoy the protection; none is the recipient of State favors. Proximity to the United States and increasing intercourse between the two countries are very potential factors in favor of the Liberal constitution and the Republic.

American Protestantism quickly entered the opened doors in Mexico, advocating religious liberty and support of the Republic. Evangelical forces there are strong and aggressive. Only occasionally do missionaries encounter persecution, though even this year there have been fanatical outbreaks of a serious character against two of our Baptist missions. With a free press, free schools, freedom of communication by extensive railway and telegraph lines and a good postal system, Mexico has entered upon a new era and presents to us a great opportunity for evangelical effort to lift her fifteen millions of people into the light and liberty of the Gospel.

Rome Indicted

By her inexpugnable record of eighty-five years' hostility to Mexican independence and republican institutions closely resembling those of the United States, Rome stands indicted and convicted before the civilized world as the implacable, intriguing, unscrupulous, unsleeping enemy of religious liberty and human progress. Other influences antagonistic to that Republic there have been, but none, nor all combined, in their intensity and extent have equalled the enmity of the Church of Rome. When her prelates here prate about their admiration and love for our democratic institutions, when they dilate on the democratic sympathies of the papacy—point them to Mexico and they are mute. And when Mexico herself awakes to thorough consciousness of the ills she has suffered at the hands of the Romish Church—as a clog upon her advancement, a menace to her peace and prosperity, an instigator of revolutions, a murderer of patriots—she will shake herself free from her worst foe disguised as an angel of light, and taking the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to her heart will enter the ranks of Protestant nations in the van of the world's progress.

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